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ABSTRACT

As a result of the impact of economic industrialization on the U.S. economy, the extended family in the United States has fragmented; nuclear families have lost contact with sources of parenting information and, increasingly, when parenting problems have occurred, the assistance of social service agencies has been requested. The lack of parenting skills and the inability to cope with acutely stressful situations, frequently combined with economic distress, often cause modern families to be disrupted and children to be placed in foster care. The use of foster care services may at first glance appear to be less expensive than the employment of home-based services. However, accurate comparisons are difficult to make because interventions made in the two approaches are not equivalent. Generally, home-based services are more desirable than foster care alternatives because they treat the root causes of family problems (such as lack of parenting skills) and minimize disruption of children's lives. Whenever possible, children needing assistance should be placed with relatives rather than in a foster home in order to maintain stability and continuity. Some local social service agencies in Virginia have recognized the human and financial savings resulting from providing services to families prior to family break-up. It is apparent, however, that before preventive home-based family services can be adequately provided, several barriers must be overcome. (RH)

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KEEPING FAMILIES TOGETHER: A "New" Philosophy

An Issue Statement Developed By
the Virginia Division for Children

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November, 1981

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The family has been called the primary societal unit for the propagation, socialization, education and nurturance of children. Unfortunately, this characterization has become only historically valid. While the 1909 White House Conference on the Care of Dependent Children declared that poverty alone should not be grounds for removing a child from his home and went on to voice their recognition of the family as the highest product of civilization,[1] this underlying premise for the delivery of child welfare services was lost until recent years. Instead, the roles that once typified the family unit have been usurped, delegated or assumed by non-relative caregivers, the day care center, the kindergarten teacher, the foster home and the local department of public welfare.

This paper will explore both the reasons why such an event occurred and the recent shift of the pendulum back to the 1909 emphasis on the family. Particular attention will be given to the emergence of a philosophy that embraces the provision of supportive services in the home to the entire family in an effort to hopefully prevent its dissolution. It will also examine the cost effectiveness of this approach in terms of dollar savings, as well as, in terms of maintaining the emotional strength of the family.

In-home support services* can take a variety of forms and be initiated by myriad reasons. However, it is our purpose to focus on those familial

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* For purposes of this paper, the following "definition" as utilized by the Virginia Department of Welfare in their report, Reprogramming Social Services for the Eighties: A Family-Focused Approach will provide the framework for the discussion of in-home/home-based services: 1) the service is provided primarily in the family's home, 2) the parents remain in charge, 3) the family is the service unit, 4) the service team provides, or arranges for, assistance with any problem, 5) extensive use is made of family, neighborhood, extended family and community resources and 6) the service is as comprehensive as required to maintain, strengthen and improve family life." (page 14)

problems and the corollary services that may prevent a child from being placed in foster care and thereby disrupting the family unit.

The Roots of the Problem

In the last century, the American economy has been transformed from one based on its land and its people to one based on its machines. Paralleling this economic change was a similar metamorphosis in the American family. Even though historians and social scientists from the mid-1800's until today have chronicled the societal impact of the advent of industrialization, it was not until recently that the inherent truth in their theories was recognized.

As the level of industrialization increased, extended families were separated. Individual nuclear family units spread across the country seeking employment. By this act, the family believed that they were improving their quality of life by increasing their proximity to jobs with enhanced earning potential. However, in actuality, this move proved to ultimately have destructive consequences for the fabric of the family.

New parents were separated from their parents and young children from grandparents. Admittedly, this situation forced young parents to wholly assume responsibilities which previously they had shared with their parents. To a certain extent, this separation caused individuals to mature to a level of independence. However, in addition to this apparently positive consequence, there were numerous negative outgrowths that have affected families for decades.

In these negative by-products of industrialization lie the roots of the current child welfare policy dilemma. This separation of families served to effectively prevent the transmission of parenting skills from

the experienced older parent to the new one. It also served to destroy the familial support system at a time when the quantity and variety of stressful situations to which families were being exposed were intensifying tremendously.

Parenting is an issue which deserves serious consideration. In his work, How to Parent, Dr. Fitzhugh Dobson writes,

> Our contemporary society gives practically no training in how to parent. We do not trust a secretary into an office with no training in typing or shorthand, and say to her: "You're a secretary now - go to it!" But, when a woman becomes a mother, it's as if society suddenly says to her: "You're a parent now. We haven't told you much about how to parent; but go to it, and do the very best you can!"[2]

Unfortunately, by the act of producing a child one does not automatically know how to be an effective parent. When extended families lived together, the parenting skills that had been learned over generations were easily shared. However, now that families are separated, often parents are not effective in their "jobs" and problems, often severe, arise. When parenting problems occur, outside assistance, often in the form of a social service agency, is called to help the family solve their current crisis.

In addition to the absence of role models and parenting instructors, families today are faced with many stresses. Inflation, unemployment and crime are on the rise. The incidence of substance abuse, youth suicides, and teenage pregnancy continues to be problematic. At one time, families could depend on other family members to help them cope with and address these stress producing situations. This is no longer the case. Instead, society witnesses the victims of parents who are unable to cope when we see the thousands of children who are physically and emotionally abused annually. Again, the need exists for outside assistance to help families to handle the problems.

It is just such situations, a lack of parenting skills and an inability to cope with acute stressful situations often combined with economic distress that causes families to be disrupted and children to be placed in foster care.[3]

Why Do Children Enter Foster Care?

Children are placed in foster home arrangements for a variety of reasons. Historically, these reasons were collectively known as the five D's, death, divorce, desertion, disease and delinquency. However, in the most recent annual report on foster care services (FY 79-80) prepared by the State Department of Welfare, only one of the five D's, delinquency, was listed as a reason for the department having custody of the child. In foster care reporting vehicles, the five D's have been replaced by the following categories, child abuse and neglect, child in need of services, delinquency, entrustment agreement and parents' request.

The largest percentage (42%)[4] of children entering foster care during FY 79-80 were victims of child abuse and neglect. In developing goal plans for these children, it is certainly of value to know that this was the primary reason which precipitated these children's entry into the system. However, the five D's, being more problem-specific, were probably of far greater value in at least pinpointing a partial basis for the root of the family crisis.

Although the categories now used by the local social service agencies for reporting entry causes are not very problem-specific, other reporting requirements have been recently initiated which are of far greater benefit in working with the family toward reunification. Consider the following tables[5] that note the problems being experienced by the parents of these children.

RELATIVE PERCENTAGE OF FATHERS HAVING CONDITIONS

Condition	Initial Conditions Active	Initial Conditions Closed	Current Conditions Active	Current Conditions Closed
Lack of Parenting Skills	64%	66%	67%	46%
Lack of Child's Supervision	44%	43%	38%	32%
Marital Conflict	43%	39%	27%	25%
Inadequate Financial Resources	38%	23%	28%	11%

RELATIVE PERCENTAGE OF MOTHERS HAVING CONDITIONS

Condition	Initial Conditions Active	Initial Conditions Closed	Current Conditions Active	Current Conditions Closed
Lack of Parenting Skills	77%	69%	76%	49%
Lack of Child's Supervision	61%	60%	50%	34%
Inadequate Financial Resources	53%	36%	44%	18%
Marital Conflict	32%	32%	23%	21%
Under/Unemployment	31%	30%	22%	19%

The primary problem for both mothers and fathers was a lack of parenting skills with the second leading cause being a lack of child's supervision. From this information, it would appear that the entry of thousands of children into foster care in Virginia alone could have been prevented if the parents had received training in the tools of effective parenting. These skills could have been imparted before or certainly when they became parents thereby lessening the possibility of severe problems ever developing.

Home-based Services: What's Happening in Virginia

Some local social service agencies in Virginia have recognized the human and financial savings of providing services to families prior to family break-up. They realize that until coordinated services are provided to families in the home, we will continue to witness the unnecessary destruction of our families.

The Family Services Task Force of the State Department of Welfare reported the following local initiatives on the home-based services arena in Reprogramming Social Services for the Eighties: A Family Focused Approach:

York/Poquoson

The York/Poquoson agency, for example, has been working for the past several years to reduce foster care caseloads and costs through the use of structural family therapy. The agency has placed emphasis on obtaining adequate training for staff in therapeutic intervention with the family. The purpose of the training is to provide social workers the skills necessary to help families resolve problems and remain intact, thereby avoiding out-of-home placement. Structural family therapy focuses on the provision of therapeutic interventions by workers which directly change existing dysfunctional roles and patterns of interaction within the family unit.

Despite rising numbers of agency and self-referrals for service, York/Poquoson has seen a decrease in the numbers of foster care placements and expenditures in recent years, which it attributes mainly to the family-oriented approach to service delivery. The number of children in foster care has decreased from 73 in FY 1978 to 30 in FY 1980. Annual foster care expenditures have been reduced from $180,000 to $59,000 during the same period. Training costs have increased from $1,700 in FY 1978 to $8,100 in FY 1980.

Virginia Beach

The Virginia Beach Department of Social Services has reorganized staff to improve services to families. Family stabilization services are provided through four units: an assessment and referral unit; an Interact Unit; and two Family Stabilization Units. The Assessment and Referral Unit provides information and referral for agency and community programs. The Unit assists with emergency food, clothing, and other special needs that cannot be met through government programs. EPSDT (Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnosis and Treatment) is also provided through this unit. Interact is a 24-hour human service hotline, staffed by professionals trained in family crisis. The Family Stabilization Units are designed to develop and utilize means of improving those conditions which may potentially disrupt the family.

Richmond - Intensive Supportive Services to Minimize Foster Care Placement.

As a result of the foster care studies conducted in Virginia and a continued interest in reducing the foster care population, the Virginia State Department of Welfare received funding from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to implement an Intensive Support Services Project (ISSU) in the City of Richmond Welfare Department, Bureau of Social Services, Family Services Division. Among the strategies utilized to prevent or minimize foster care placement of children was that of providing intensive social and economic support services and counseling to intact ADC families to bolster and maximize their strengths and provide for deficits or needs that otherwise might result in family separation. Additionally, caseworkers carried caseloads of no more than 15 cases to allow them sufficient time to provide more intensive, preventive services.

The close involvement of the staff with these families helped in identifying early risk situations. Short-term placements were made in these situations to stabilize the family and thus circumvent long-term placement. Additionally, clients were much more satisfied with the services and help rendered by their caseworkers. They also appeared able to gain more from discussing their problems with their caseworkers, friends or relatives than clients receiving routine services.

A spin-off of the services provided to the Experimental families was that many became employed in higher than entry level jobs and several insisted on repaying monies used to augment their ADC or GR grants.[6]

Prevention: Saving Dollars and Lives

Unfortunately, very little research has been done regarding the cost effectiveness of home-based services. In fact, the following recommendation appeared in the final report of the Family Services Task Force,

> The Department of Welfare should measure program effectiveness in terms of outcome, impact, and costs. These measures should be designed to determine whether individuals or families have benefitted from services provided them and whether programs are meeting the intensified needs of the family unit. In order to provide a means of comparison, a data base for determining unit costs of services must be developed.[7]

However, it is possible to compare the costs of the Richmond City Intensive Support Services Project with those for foster care. From April, 1979, through September, 1980, 177 families[8] were served by the Richmond project at a total cost of $217,559,[9] i.e., approximately $1,230 per family. During approximately the same period (FY 79-80), the Virginia Department of Welfare served 9,433 children through the foster care program at a cost of $7,639,729[11] or approximately $810 per child.

On the surface, it would appear that services to the child in foster care were less expensive than the home-based services, but the comparison merits a closer examination.

Home-based Services ($1,230/per family/per year)	Foster Care Services ($810/per child/per year)
. services are provided to a total family thereby addressing the roots of the problem and not only the exbiting symptoms	. services are provided to individual children therefore, if there are two children in foster care* from one family, that family is receiving $1,620 worth of foster care services in one year[12]
. home-based services help the family to learn and improve on their own unique strengths	. outside of home services imbue children and families with feelings of impotency. They become dependent on outside help instead of on their own strengths
. families may be incomplete...but where the family exerts its influence benevolently, with consideration, understanding, and compassion for each individual member, the balanced opportunities for a unique development and for social adaptation are maximized.[13]	. studies have shown that the two basic fears of childhood appear to be loss of parental love and parental desertion.[14] These feelings often lead to far greater problems later in life, i.e., poor school performance therefore, poor employment potential, poor self-esteem, therefore mental health problems, etc.

* In a recent study of children in foster care, completed by the State Department of Welfare, only eleven percent (11%) of the children in care did not also have a sibling in foster care.

The Extended Family

Another family support option that is available to human service providers is the placement of children with members of their extended family. Occasionally family problems reach such a critical point before outside assistance is sought that it is necessary to remove the child(ren) temporarily from the home. In these instances, it should be incumbent upon the human service provider to place the highest priority upon arranging for temporary foster care for the child with a member of his/her family.

Although this option is available now and has been for a number of years, by practice it has not become the preferred avenue of action. Far too frequently, social workers will seek non-relative foster home placements or termination of parental rights so that adoptive parents can be sought without even approaching the child's grandparents, aunts, uncles, etc.

Why does this occur? Obviously, there is no "hard and fast" answer to this question, but theories regarding this phenomenon have been developed. Some believe that by placing a child with a relative that you are not removing the child from the problem. Others contend that there is a time factor. Although placement with a relative may be preferrable, approval of that person's home takes time inasmuch as the welfare department has legal custody of the child, that child must be placed in a legally approved foster home placement. Still others argue that the family problems are often so severe as to preclude the possibility of re-unification therefore adoption is the more desirable approach.

It is the position of this paper that a temporary or permanent* foster

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* Some readers of this issue statement may question an emphasis being placed on permanent foster care rather than upon adoption. Often relatives are not inclined to adopt the child of a sister, nephew, etc. Although they may love this child and be willing to provide a stable home, they fear that by the act of legally adopting the child they have confirmed the parents' belief that they will never be able to care for the child. Such a step is often in total conflict with the family's desire to work with other family members so that they can resolve the problems which they are experiencing. For this reason, it is the position of this paper that permanent foster care with relatives is a viable and preferred option for children whose nuclear family is experiencing problems.

care placement with relatives offers a valuable opportunity for maintaining stability and continuity in the child's life. The child will probably have emotional ties with these people, be familiar with their home, lifestyle and neighborhood, possibly have the same last name and be generally more able to quickly adjust here than in a placement with non-relatives. At the same time, these members of the child's extended family will be familiar with the child and his/her problems and will probably be more willing to work with the child, the natural parents and the welfare department toward the re-unification of the nuclear family unit.

Conclusion

In 1973, when the Child Welfare League of America (CWLA) developed their Preliminary Statement on Social Work Service for Children in Their Own Homes, the CWLA Executive Director and the Director of Standards Development noted:

> Our purpose in issuing this statement now is to stimulate the extension and creation of services for children and their parents that will give more children the opportunity to grow up under conditions that are favorable for their optimum development. Such services express a threefold concern: for the well-being of individual children, for the strengthening of family life, and for the vitality of a democratic society whose future depends on the well-being of its children.[15]

It appears that Virginia is now beginning to recognize the value of providing services to children in their own homes.

However, in surveying the local welfare departments regarding barriers to initiating home-based services, the Family Services Task Force received the following responses:

> Eighty-two percent of respondents indicated that lack of funds presents a major barrier to the development of comprehensive family-oriented services. Respondents said categorically-mandated services decrease local flexibility

> and funds available to try new approaches. Forty-two percent of respondents cited lack of a preventive approach to service delivery as being a major barrier to the provision of comprehensive family services in their community. Respondents said that services are often provided on a crisis intervention level and have little impact in improving the overall level of family functioning.[16]

These barriers must be overcome. Until services are mandated that support rather than disrupt the family, the multitude of problems that can be traced to a lack of parenting skills, an inability to cope with stressful situations, and the resultant unstable home environment will continue.

Consider the following options:

1) the provision of home-based services by local departments of public welfare should be mandated and supported as the primary approach for dealing with family problems;
2) relatives should be utilized, whenever possible, as temporary and/or permanent foster home placements;
3) adoption should be considered lastly only after every attempt has been made to re-unify the family; and
4) the extended family should be viewed as a primary source of support and assistance to the nuclear family.

FOOTNOTES

[1] U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, 200 Years of Children (Washington, D.C.: OHD, 1977), p. 409.

[2] Fitzhugh Dodson, How to Parent (New York: Signet, 1970), p. 22.

[3] According to the Annual Report on Foster Care Services prepared by the State Department of Welfare, in June, 1981, there were 8,751 children in foster care in Virginia.

William Lukhard, Annual Report on Foster Care Services (Richmond: Department of Welfare, 1980), p. 2.

[4] William Lukhard, Annual Report on Foster Care Services (Richmond: Department of Welfare, 1980), p. 9.

[5] Bureau of Management Services, Detailed Statistical Analysis for the Report (Richmond: Virginia Department of Welfare, 1980), p. 8.

[6] Division of Social Services, Reprogramming Social Services for the Eighties: A Family-Focused Approach (Richmond: Virginia Department of Welfare, 1980), pp. 19-24.

[7] Ibid, p. viii.

[8] Bureau of Social Services, Family Services Division, Intensive Supportive Services to Minimize Foster Care Placement (Richmond: Virginia Department of Welfare, 1980), p. 2.

[9] Ibid, p. 49.

[10] Department of Welfare, Virginia Department of Welfare Annual Report (Richmond: Board of Welfare, 1979-80), p. 7.

[11] Ibid, p. 22.

[12] Bureau of Management Services, p. 5.

[13] Joseph Goldstein, Anna Freud, Albert J. Solnit, Beyond the Best Interests of Children (New York: Macmillan, 1973), p.16.

[14] Sidney Z. Moss, "How Children Feel About Being Placed Away from Home," Children, (July-August, 1966).

[15] Child Welfare League of America, Inc., Child Welfare League of America Preliminary Statement on Social Work Services for Children in Their Own Homes (New York: CWLA, 1973), p. ix.

[16] Division of Social Services, p. 25